

FIRST READING: Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14

A reading from the Book of Exodus:

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, “This month shall stand at the head of your calendar; you shall reckon it the first month of the year. Tell the whole community of Israel: On the tenth of this month every one of your families must procure for itself a lamb, one apiece for each household. If a family is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join the nearest household in procuring one and shall share in the lamb in proportion to the number of persons who partake of it. The lamb must be a year-old male and without blemish. You may take it from either the sheep or the goats. You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, and then, with the whole assembly of Israel present, it shall be slaughtered during the evening twilight. They shall take some of its blood and apply it to the two doorposts and the lintel of every house in which they partake of the lamb. That same night they shall eat its roasted flesh with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. “This is how you are to eat it: with your loins girt, sandals on your feet and your staff in hand, you shall eat like those who are in flight. It is the Passover of the LORD. For on this same night I will go through Egypt, striking down every firstborn of the land, both man and beast, and executing judgment on all the gods of Egypt—I, the LORD! But the blood will mark the houses where you are. Seeing the blood, I will pass over you; thus, when I strike the land of Egypt, no destructive blow will come upon you. “This day shall be a memorial feast for you, which all your generations shall celebrate with pilgrimage to the LORD, as a perpetual institution.”

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 116:12-13, 15-16bc, 17-18.

Our blessing-cup is a communion with the Blood of Christ.

How shall I make a return to the LORD for all the good he has done for me? The cup of salvation I will take up, and I will call upon the name of the LORD.

Our blessing-cup is a communion with the Blood of Christ.

Precious in the eyes of the LORD is the death of his faithful ones. I am your servant, the son of your handmaid; you have loosed my bonds.

Our blessing-cup is a communion with the Blood of Christ.

To you will I offer sacrifice of thanksgiving, and I will call upon the name of the LORD. My vows to the LORD I will pay in the presence of all his people.

Our blessing-cup is a communion with the Blood of Christ.

SECOND READING: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

A reading from the first Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians:

Brothers and sisters: I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it

and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes.

The word of the Lord.

GOSPEL: John 13:1-15

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to John:

Before the feast of Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father. He loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end. The devil had already induced Judas, son of Simon the Iscariot, to hand him over. So, during supper, fully aware that the Father had put everything into his power and that he had come from God and was returning to God, he rose from supper and took off his outer garments. He took a towel and tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and dry them with the towel around his waist. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Master, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered and said to him, "What I am doing, you do not understand now, but you will understand later." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "Unless I wash you, you will have no inheritance with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Master, then not only my feet, but my hands and head as well." Jesus said to him, "Whoever has bathed has no need except to have his feet washed, for he is clean all over; so you are clean, but not all." For he knew who would betray him; for this reason, he said, "Not all of you are clean." So when he had washed their feet and put his garments back on and reclined at table again, he said to them, "Do you realize what I have done for you? You call me 'teacher' and 'master,' and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection for Holy Thursday

Why does the feast of Easter change each year? It is linked to the date of the Jewish Passover as was the first Easter. Our calendar is based on the solar cycle. The time it takes the Earth to do a full orbit of the sun is three hundred and sixty five days and a few hours. The extra hours add up so that every fourth year is a Leap Year when the year's length is three hundred and sixty six days. The bible's calendar is lunar, based on the cycle of the moon's orbit around the earth, which is about twenty eight days. Therein lies the reason for a variable date for Easter and the Passover.

We determine Easter to be the first Sunday after or on the first full moon that follows the spring equinox. The dates of Easter and the Passover do not always coincide. Passover occurs most years during the second full moon after the spring equinox, except in leap year when it occurs during the first full moon. Passover can happen on any day of the week while Easter is always on a Sunday. The ancient Hebrew people were nomads for forty years. They could see the moon and measure its cycle by eye. It takes a bit more attention to determine the solar

cycle. Other ancient peoples were able to do that. Usually they were settled people who lived generations in the same location.

Tonight's readings began with the first Passover. It began the Exodus of God's people from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land. The name of the feast came from God "passing over" the Hebrew households marked with lamb's blood. God would "smite" the households of all the Egyptians on that night. God saved God's people from slavery and death that night. Each generation of their descendants has celebrated the Passover as if God had done this deed for them, personally. They remembered the past as if it were the present.

The first was a feast in anticipation of a long trek. Today, it is a feast of thanksgiving for what God has already done. The feast is also communal. A family or families gather together and celebrate with a good meal that is also religious worship. There is a set ritual that involves the active participation of all present who attend. I've been to them. There is good food and more wine than I normally drink at a meal. To us, as Catholics, we can note both similarities and differences between a Jewish Seder meal and our mass. Many of our prayers and rituals have deep Jewish roots. However, sitting through Sunday mass takes about an hour, not an entire evening. I'm glad that the precious blood of Jesus is usually but a sip. After a few glasses of wine, it can get hard to read the texts.

The Passover Seder is the context for the Holy Thursday Vigil. Jesus joined with his disciples for such a meal as their last supper together. The response for tonight's Psalm mentions the "Blessing Cup." This was the last glass of wine for the Seder Meal. It was shared and passed for all to drink. As they were to share it, they all shared the same Exodus and life of God. It symbolized their unity. This is why the Catholic Church restored communion sharing the Precious Blood of Jesus. Our communion in the body and blood of Jesus is the outward sign of our identity as Jesus' Church; his living, mystical body and blood. It binds us with one another in Christ.

Yet, note well; there is no Eucharist, no sharing of food mentioned in the gospel. Jesus washes the disciple's feet and does not institute the Eucharist. Paul is the one to describe it. Sometimes we can forget the time line of our Christian Scriptures. John's gospel, from which tonight's gospel has come, was written many years later than Paul wrote his letters. Paul's epistles have some of the earliest references to the gospel's events, Christian beliefs and religious ritual. Tonight is no exception. Paul celebrated the Eucharist. It was more like a meal than our mass, but we can know his description as our own.

Why did Jesus wash feet instead of instituting the Eucharist? John did that earlier in his narrative. Jesus asked a question, "Do you realize what I have done for you?" He didn't just direct his query to the twelve lads. I say twelve because Judas had not yet left the meal. Jesus washed his feet too. He was not excluded from Jesus' act of service. He's asked you and me this question. How will we answer him? It is Jesus who saves; who has acted in time to bond us to the Father through him. Usually I take a shower in the morning and step out of it with clean feet too. I've also taken sponge baths and know to sit down to wash my feet. Jesus action of washing was more than it seems.

Jesus used two of his titles, teacher, rabbi, and master, lord. Here was the head guy, the leader of the pack, God himself who served them. This is the establishment of service, ministry, as the Church's work. He finished this passage saying, "I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do." Ministry, service, is as important for the life of the Church as is sharing the Eucharist. Both share the life and presence of Jesus.

The Church has traditionally made the link between Jesus' service and the founding of the priesthood. Ministry is the work of all Church members, not just the few or, today, fewer. All of us have received Jesus' commission to serve. Many do as parish ministers. I like one version of the Stations of the Cross, Everyone's Way of the Cross. It focuses on our link with Jesus and one another.

Here is an example that shows the nature of service, ministry. "Lord, make me realize that each time I wipe a dish, pick up an object off the floor, assist a child in some small task, or give another preference in traffic or the store; each time I feed the hungry, clothe the naked, teach the ignorant, or lend my hand in any way, it matters not to whom, my name is Simon. And the kindness I extend to them I really give to You." What is the difference between ministry and good deeds? Our intent. Call it what it is in the eyes of Jesus; service as he served. Our intent, like Jesus, is a mere thought away.

God's people in Exodus shared their meal in anticipation of God's gift of salvation. Tonight we gather knowing God and give thanks for God's action on our part. We also gather as sinners who continue to need God's saving gifts. We gather in anticipation of tomorrow, Good Friday, when Jesus died. Even though he died but once and never more, we gather as if we were there as witnesses of all Jesus' saving deeds. Tonight we have worshiped making past events our present reality. Jesus saves us now. By the way, tomorrow is also Income Tax Day.

May we know Jesus as he accompanies us on our way to him

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April 14th 2022